

null
Leza L Olson 09/28/2006 02:30:20 PM From DB/Inbox: Leza L Olson

Cable
Text:

C O N F I D E N T I A L NOFORN TEL AVIV 03844

SIPDIS
CXTela:

ACTION: ECON
INFO: IPSC SCI IMO CONS RES POL DCM AMB AID FCS PD
ADM

DISSEMINATION: ECON
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: DCM:GCRETZ
DRAFTED: ECON:RTANSEY
CLEARED: ECON:JWITOW, POL:MSIEVERS

VZCZCTVI948
PP RUEHC RUEHKK RHEHNSC RUCNDT
DE RUEHTV #3844/01 2710910
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 280910Z SEP 06
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6610
INFO RUEHKK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 4127

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 003844

SIPDIS

NOFORN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/27/2016
TAGS: [SENV](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KPKO](#) [LE](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: GOI PERSPECTIVE ON WAZZANI SPRINGS

REF: A. BEIRUT 03073

[1](#)B. TEL AVIV 03816

Classified By: DCM Gene A. Cretz, Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C/NF) Summary: According to an MFA official, the villagers of Rajar (aka Ghajjar) resumed using piped water from the nearby Wazzani Springs after the IDF drove Hizballah fighters away from the area during the recent conflict. Armed Hizballah fighters had stopped the villagers from using the Springs about a year and a half ago and the GOI had since made arrangements for the villagers to be connected to the Israeli Mekorot grid. The villagers took advantage of the current situation to resume using the water in lieu of buying water from Mekorot. The MFA official prepared a briefing paper for IDF officials to pass to UNIFIL at September 26 meetings, in the hope that would help dampen press speculation that the GOI was accessing Lebanese water supplies. The official presented his own idea that the GOI and GOL might gradually develop technical cooperation on water supplies, infrastructure and sewage treatment to decrease the risk that water issues might become a flash point between Israel and Lebanon. The GOI is likely to decline an offer from UNEP to do a post-conflict assessment of the damage to Israel's environment from the recent conflict. The GOI facilitated the REMPEC oil spill cleanup, but that agency declined other Israeli offers of assistance. The official said that Syria had not replied to a Lebanese query on the status of Sheba'a Farms. End summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) MFA Principal Deputy of the Middle East and Peace Process Bureau Yaacov Keidar told ESTH Officer September 26 that the GOI had not been taking water from the Wazzani Springs as alleged in the Lebanese press. Rather, villagers

from Rajar (known as Al-Ghajjar in Lebanon) had resumed their earlier use of the Springs after the IDF drove Hizballah fighters from the area during the recent conflict. Keidar said Rajar was part of Syria before 1967. The villagers are Allawites. In recent years, the inhabitants had been able to access water from the Springs using two pipes. About a year and a half ago, a visiting Hizballah official was at the Springs when a few visitors arrived to do periodic maintenance on the pipes, Keidar said. The Hizballah official questioned what the villagers were doing. A row broke out and the official called some Hizballah fighters who drove the villagers away. Subsequently, the GOI arranged for Rajar to be connected to the supply grid of the Israeli water company, Mekorot. When the IDF drove Hizballah fighters from the area this summer, the villagers saw an opportunity to access the Wazzani again and not have to pay Mekorot for water. A visit to the Springs by the villagers to perform maintenance on the pipes presumably prompted the press reports, Keidar said. He noted that residents of Rajar have ties to both Syria and Lebanon: reportedly some villagers are related to Syria's ruling family and others had used their connections to appeal (unsuccessfully) to the president of Lebanon to continue use of the Wazzani after the Hizballah fighters stopped their use of the Springs.

¶13. (C) Keidar said some of the Rajar villagers are known Hizballah sympathizers. He stated that the GOI was not concerned, however, but was keeping an eye on those villagers. Nonetheless, a September 27 report on Israel Radio News cited security head Yuval Diskin as telling the Cabinet he was concerned that weapons could be smuggled into the village and Israeli hostages smuggled into Lebanon. Keidar said that there would be a stronger IDF presence in the village and the IDF would create some kind of a barrier on the village's northern side. He noted that Syria claims the entire village and Lebanon claimed part. After the GOI invaded Lebanon in 1982, the villagers confiscated some Lebanese land and expanded the village without any official approvals by the GOI or the GOL, Keidar said.

¶14. (C) Keidar said he had drafted a paper explaining the villagers' historical and current use of the Wazzani Springs for the IDF to present in its meetings with UNIFIL September ¶26. He said he would be checking to see whether the paper had been passed to UNIFIL. He said he believed that if UNIFIL and GOL officials knew the actual situation, that would help keep the situation from getting spun up based on erroneous reports in the press that the GOI was stealing Lebanese water. He said he hoped the villagers can maintain the resumption of their traditional access to the Wazzani "based on local understandings."

¶15. (C/NF) Keidar said he saw a second stage for avoiding conflict on water issues. Saying that this concept was largely his own formulation at present, he said he believed that the new situation on the ground opened up possibilities for quiet, unofficial local cooperation on broader water issues -- while recognizing that the current Lebanese Water Minister was a member of Hizballah and that presented certain immediate constraints. At the same time, Keidar said he believed direct bilateral contacts were possible, with the GOL taking charge little by little in southern Lebanon and the south more properly governed and growing with the strengthened UNIFIL presence. While dialogue and cooperation on water-related issues were admittedly premature for the moment, Keidar said that the GOL should be interested because it would mean "no threat" to their own local water supplies and provision of expertise from Israel on water supply, infrastructure and sewage. He noted that Israel and Jordan had such cooperation prior to their bilateral peace accord.

¶16. (C) On other environmental impacts of the recent war, Keidar said that the GOI had assisted the United Nations Environment Programme in transferring to Lebanon some equipment UNEP had left in Gaza from its assessment there following last year's disengagement so that the equipment could be used in an assessment of the environmental damage from the recent conflict. UNEP had offered to do a parallel

assessment of the considerable damage to the environment in northern Israel, Keidar said, but it was unlikely the GOI would accept because it was already addressing the damage and felt it had little to gain from a UNEP study. He said the GOI had also expedited access for REMPEC, the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean, to address the oil spill on the Lebanese coast, including during the naval blockage. Keidar said the GOI had offered equipment to address the spill but REMPEC had declined that offer.

17. (C) Noting that Rajar is close to the disputed Sheba'a Farms area, Keidar said he understood that the GOL had asked Syria for a letter stating that Sheba'a was part of Lebanon, but the SARG had not replied.

Visit Embassy Tel Aviv's Classified Website:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/telaviv>

You can also access this site through the State Department's Classified SIPRNET website.

JONES